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Dem is Drunk Through the Ears:

Sound, Space, and Listening in Alevi Collective Worship Ritual

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Abstract

Dem is Drunk Through the Ears:

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In Turkey, Alevi social and religious identity is often constructed in conscious opposition to institutionalized Sunni Islam. Sound is an important medium by which the relationship of violence and resistance between Alevis and the Sunni state is produced and perpetuated. This paper focuses on the ways in which Alevi aural dispositions and spatial constructions constitute and reinforce one another. These auralities and spacialities are rehearsed and disciplined within the context of collective worship rituals [*cem* or *muhabbet*], but play a broader role in molding and thus preserving the Alevi community as a religious minority under the threat of assimilation. In particular, I

examine how Alevis map space by cultivating listening habits based on oppositions of interior and exterior, private and public, and esoteric and exoteric. Two Alevi concepts play especially prominent roles in regulating the relationship between sound and space. *Dem* refers to the divine power which resides in the words, voice, and breath of spiritually mature individuals. It is also the name for the alcohol Alevis may drink as part of their collective worship services. With the idea of dem, Alevis draw a link between listening and the acquisition of knowledge on the one hand, and drinking and interiority on the other that is embodied in the phrase "dem is drunk by the ears" [*dem kulaktan içilir*]. Just as tea is said to steep [*demlenmek*], Alevis steep—discipline themselves as Alevi subjects—during muhabbet by listening to words of wisdom spoken or sung by spiritually mature individuals. Meanwhile, dem is emplaced through its association with a face, or *didar*. The Alevi fixation on didar creates spatial orientations also experienced as listening vectors linking people together. Instead of facing towards Mecca while praying, Alevis face towards one another because they see God as the human being him/herself, and the beauty of God as reflected in the beauty of the human countenance. As a result, Alevi spiritual landscapes strikingly different from those of Sunni Islam, in which prayer is oriented towards a single, remote point.

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I. Introduction

May the Hak erenler[1] grant us all [the ability to] understand and listen.[2]

— prayer said by Dertli Divani

Many studies address the call to prayer and its role in Islamic-majority nation states in both constituting Muslim national subjects as well as destabilizing and violating the subjectivity of religious minorities or non-believers (Spadola 2013; Bandak 2014; Larkin 2014).[3] Brian Larkin (2014) notes that such minorities develop "techniques of inattention" in order to protect themselves in the potentially threatening sonic encounters of daily life. I found this to be the case among the Alevis I worked with in Turkey as well.[4] However, to focus exclusively on modes of non-listening would be to ignore the complex ways in which Alevis negotiate a listening praxis in the positive sense, or what we might call an aural ideology—Alevi conceptions regarding the act of listening and its ideal function within their broader spiritual and humanistic project. In this paper, I will

[1] Spiritually mature individuals who have contributed to the longevity of Alevi religion, e.g. by writing poetry.
[2] *Hak erenler cem-i cümlemize anlamak ve dinlemek nasip eylesin.*
[3] Other studies address the role of the call to prayer in constituting Muslim minority subjectivity in non-Muslim majority nations (Bohlman 2013; Eisenberg 2013).
[4] My field research in Turkey during the 2014-15 academic year was funded by a Fulbright Student Research Grant. I would like to thank the Fulbright Commission as well as Dertli Divani, Barış Kılçık, Ahmet Koçak, Ulaş Özdemir, Suna Sucu, Ümit Şimşek, and all members of the Istanbul and Ankara "mekteb-i irfan" muhabbet groups for their generous support during my time in Turkey. At the University of Texas at Austin I would like to thank my advisor Sonia Seeman and professors Andrew Dell'Antonio, Courtney Handman, A. Azfar Moin, and Jeannette Okur for deepening and broadening my research project and enriching my intellectual experience at graduate school.

examine how Alevis map space, or create landscape, in the context of collective worship [*cem* or *muhabbet*] by cultivating listening habits based on oppositions of interior and exterior, private and public, and esoteric [*bâtın*] and exoteric [*zâhir*]. These binaries are rooted in Alevi metaphysics and should be understood not as empirical categories, but in terms of the work they do for Alevis in structuring space and listening.

According to Markus Dressler, the Alevis comprise "a number of heterogeneous socio-religious communities in Turkey and the Balkans, historically referred to as Qızılbaş, who, in the twentieth century, began to share a common trans-regional Alevi identity called Alevism (Tr. Alevilik)" (Dressler 2016). Today, they are the largest religious minority in Turkey, constituting by various estimates 10-15% of the country's total population (Dressler 2013: xi). Alevi religion draws upon symbolic resources associated with Shi'a Islam that were widespread in early modern Anatolia such as the figure of Ali (cousin and son-in-law of the Islamic Prophet Muhammed) as Divinity, the sacred lineage of the Twelve Imams, and the narrative of the Imam Hüseyin's martyrdom at Kerbelâ. In the Alevi tradition, these symbols are rendered meaningful through the polyvocal discourse of oral poetry [*deyiş*] composed and performed by poet-saints [*ozan* or *âşık*], rather than the texts and institutions of orthodox Shi'a Islam. Meanwhile, Sunni Islam as institutionalized in the Ottoman and Turkish states has always served as the Other in Alevi self-identity constructions. The antagonistic relationship between Alevis and the Sunni state has articulated itself most explicitly in a series of massacres against Alevis spanning Ottoman and Turkish Republican periods. As I will argue, sound is an

important medium by which this relationship of violence and resistance is produced and perpetuated.

Every Thursday evening in the southeastern Anatolian Alevi village where I conducted field research, the villagers hold a collective worship service called *cem*. The so-called "cem house" [*cem evi*] is a nondescript two-story building with a kitchen complex on the ground floor and a single large room on the second floor where worship takes place. The worship hall is unfurnished except for traditional rugs and cushions, and everybody sits cross-legged on the floor. At the head of the room is a rectangular open space called the *meydan* in which various ritual services [*hizmet*] transpire and around which are seated the most distinguished members of the religious community, particularly the *baba* (local religious leader, also called *dede*) and the *zakir*s (those who perform sacred hymns called *deyiş* and accompany themselves on the long-necked lute called *bağlama* or *saz*). That the *cem* service cannot proceed without the presence of the *zakir* points to the centrality of music in Alevi ritual.

Both the zakir's performance and the congregation's listening practices are regulated as part of the production of Alevi ritual space, as I observed one Thursday evening while attending cem together with the local religious leader Mehmet Baba.[5] Mehmet Baba invited me to sit on his left at the head of the meydan, while on his right sat three zakirs, including his nephew Halil. People were still drifting in when the zakirs

[5] I use pseudonyms throughout for the individuals I interacted with in this village.

began to play—five deyiş back to back plus a *duaz-ı imam*, a special genre of deyiş containing the names of each of the Twelve Imams. They played for about twenty five minutes, during which time a congregation of about fifty assembled, many of whom were children. After the zakirs finished singing the duaz-ı imam, Mehmet Baba recited a brief prayer in Turkish called a *gülbenk*. He then addressed the congregation.

> Every community, every faith has its own rules and concepts. The rules of our path, children, are that when you enter through the door of the cem evi, if you are sitting in back, you say "hü" [an Alevi greeting] from there and sit down in your place. And just as we don't make noise once we enter—look we sit quietly in our spots—you will also sit in your spots. Getting up and leaving every other minute is not right. You must obey these rules, look we obey them. Maybe right now you're really young, now and then you get up and leave because you don't understand, but when you get a bit older you'll know that this is wrong. After we enter through the door our worship here is more than just playing saz. The muhabbet here, even our way of sitting inside is our worship.

Music, Mehmet Baba suggested, is only one facet of Alevi worship, tied to a broader regimen of self-discipline. He described the nature and purpose of worship.

> The one hundred twenty-four thousand prophets of Allah have no need for any community's worship, faith, fasting, or prayer. Our faith and this worship we do is to help us achieve spiritual maturity [*bizi insan-ı kâmil mertebesine eriştirmek için*]. Our fasting, our religious practice is meant to ripen us into mature individuals. Besides, if one's worship takes them away from wrongdoing, that worship is legitimate and true. If it doesn't take them away from wrongdoing, either there is a problem with the worship itself, or there is a problem with the person walking the spiritual path. The Hak erenler[6] granted us such a beautiful path as this. We need to recognize the value of this beauty.

As Mehmet Baba continued, the call to prayer began to sound from the nearby mosque and bleed into the cem evi. Built with government money in the early 1970s, this mosque sparked a rise in the previously negligible Sunni population of the village, which now comprises about a quarter of the total population of around 6,000. Cutting himself off, Mehmet Baba turned to his nephew, the zakir Halil and requested that he play something. "Let's not listen to the hoca [local Sunni religious employee]," he said under his breath. Halil began a deyiş by the thirteenth-century poet [*ozan*] Yunus Emre.

[6] Spiritually mature individuals who have contributed to the longevity of Alevi religion.

If once you broke a heart	*Bir kez gönül yıktın ise*
This thing you do is not prayer	*Bu kıldığın namaz değil*
Seeing seventy two nations as one	*Yetmiş iki millet dahi*
Is what washes your hands and face	*Elin yüzün yumaz değil*

Thus Halil helped maintain the continuity of the cem both by performing a deyiş that commented on Mehmet Baba's preceding discussion of worship, as well as by covering up the Sunni sound coming in from outside with the sacred tone of the Alevi bağlama. Like Mehmet Baba's warning against children leaving the room, this impromptu performance can be understood as an effort towards preserving the integrity of Alevi ritual space and the divisions this space establishes between interior and exterior, private and public, and esoteric and exoteric knowledge. Just as people exiting the room threatens this integrity, so does sound entering from outside. In this paper, I argue that Alevi aural dispositions and spatial constructions constitute and reinforce one another. These auralities and spacialities are rehearsed and disciplined within the context of the cem or muhabbet ritual, but play a broader role in molding and thus preserving the Alevi community as a religious minority in Turkey and the diaspora. Therefore, they also constitute important modes of resistance against Sunni hegemony in the Turkish public sphere.

Fig. 1: Sitting at the village cem service.

II. The call to prayer and sound in the Turkish public sphere

Don't climb up the minaret and yell at us
We've heard the news, we're not deaf
Think about yourself, don't go after us
We don't intend to fight with you[7]

—Aşık İbreti (1920-1976)[8]

The call to prayer is an example of what Andreas Bandak calls a refrain, a term he borrows from Deleuze to refer to the "sedimentation of particular melodic lines that people intone and follow in their daily life" (Bandak 2014: S249). For these scholars, refrains are assemblages that gather convergent sensory stimuli and discourses around repetitive sound. In the Alevi sensorium, for example, the call to prayer may be assembled alongside other refrains such as the omnipresent voice of the president Tayyip Erdoğan in the mass media, producing a polyphonic refrain that can evoke visceral feelings of repugnance and indignation.[9] The national refrain of Erdoğan's voice is heard

[7] *Minareye çıkıp bize bağırma* / *Haberimiz vardır sağır değiliz* / *Sen kendini düşün bizi kayırma* / *Sizlerle kavgaya uğur değiliz*
[8] Aşık İbreti was a poet-composer [*aşık*] from Sarız, Kayseri associated with the "Hakikatçılar" reform movement.
[9] Enlightenment proponents of privatized belief acted similarly to Alevis when they found Evangelicals "appallingly noisy," complaining of the "visceral pain" that listening wrought on them (Schmidt 2000: 66).

coming from televisions mounted inside the more recently built ferries that criss-cross the Bosphorus, as well as in tea houses, bakeries, bars, and other commercial establishments run by right-wing sympathizers throughout the country. It also penetrates private homes through frequent television broadcasts, prompting citizens who identify as Alevi, non-religious, and/or leftist to change the channel, or more dramatically, as a friend of mine once related, throw their shoe angrily in the direction of the television set. Likewise, loudspeakers amplify the call to prayer and forcibly project it into private spaces like Alevi cem evis,[10] as I explained in my introduction. In Larkin's terms, these sounds are "promiscuous" in that they do not respect property boundaries (Larkin 2014: 1002).

The construction of modern Alevism [*Alevilik*] as a religious and cultural category took place during the early Turkish Republican period in direct reciprocal relationship with the (re-)construction of Sunni Islam as the basis for national secular identity. Sociologist Ziya Gökalp first advanced a "center-periphery" model that juxtaposed urban, orthodox Sunnism with rural, "heterodox" Alevism under the umbrella of Turkish Islam. Later adopted and popularized by Fuad Köprülü, this model established a normalized secular Sunni identity as central to notions of Turkish citizenship while casting Alevis as marginal "noble savages" who nevertheless provided raw material for the construction of "Turkish culture" (Dressler 2013: 199). By describing Alevilik in terms of "influences"

[10] It is not just sound that has been forcibly projected into cem evis—on February 19, 2016, police threw gas bombs and opened fire into a cem evi in the Gazi neighborhood of Istanbul when a group of protestors took refuge there after a demonstration (http://www.evrensel.net/haber/273025/polis-gazi-cemevine-gercek-mermilerle-ates-acti).

absorbed from dominant traditions, Köprülü enacted a discourse that would reproduce the subordination of Alevis and Alevi self-identity to a hegemonic Sunni order. As Sunni Islam began to manifest itself more explicitly within the state apparatus, supported by large swaths of the population disillusioned by Kemalism, Alevilik was increasingly cast as the obligatory Other in the consolidation of national identity. These dynamics have intensified since Tayyip Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in 2002.

In Turkey, refrains such as the call to prayer or Erdoğan's voice are reproduced by a material infrastructure which itself is largely a product of the extensive building program pursued by the AKP. In Turkey under the AKP, the construction of mosques, luxury apartments, shopping malls, bridges, roads, and other infrastructure continually reconstitutes space and marks it for Turkish Islamic piety and capitalist consumption. In particular, the state funds mosque construction in Alevi villages and next to Alevi places of worship.[11] The sounds of the call to prayer emanating from mosques are a medium for the Turkish state to assert its presence and dominance in Alevi-occupied spaces which, left alone, could threaten the ideal of a unitary nation. To dwell in these spaces as Alevi is to continually reclaim them. Playing bağlama and gathering for cem reinscribe Alevilik on the local land- and soundscape, but so do more subtle actions such as eating dinner on the roof, or telling jokes, when done in an Alevi manner.

[11] Likewise, one of Bandak's Syrian Christian informants noted that in Damascus, "Where there is a church, there also has to be a mosque. But not the opposite" (Bandak 2014: S255).

Emilio Spadola describes the process by which the call to prayer not only constructs space but also interpellates individuals as national subjects. The call to prayer mediates God's original call to humankind to accept and follow the "true faith" of Islam. In turn, piety is construed as a performative "responsibility to the divine call" which, together with the call itself, establishes a dialectic that reproduces the discursive system of Islam (Spadola 2013: 4-5, 37). God's call has always been abstracted from its source because Sunni cosmology posits a transcendent God. The emergence of modern tools of mass mediation, however, has made it possible to bury the call even further within the state bureaucracy. This allows the state to harness the power of what Judith Butler terms the "divine performative" and utilize the calls of God to constitute addressees from a distance as national subjects via Althusserian "hailings" (Ibid. 7).

Such hailings are not, however, what constitute Alevi subjects. Rather, Alevis must struggle to assert and maintain their identity while being constantly mis-hailed, in other words, assimilated by state-sponsored religious ideology. Pious Sunni Muslims likely experience the call to prayer as the positive attunement of ostensibly secular urban space in accord with Islamic moral virtues. Alevis, however, experience it as a "space of noise pollution," a physically violent "assault on the ears" that differs from other forms of violence only in degree (Hirschkind 2009: 125). For them, the call to prayer is a refrain that gathers together the totality of polarizing anti-Alevi rhetoric propagated by the state, packaging it in one sonorous bundle that produces repugnance as a bodily marker of difference and indexes the state's resounding failure to maintain secular democracy.

In order to cope with such assaults on their ears and their subjectivity, Alevis cultivate what Larkin (2014) calls "techniques of inattention." Larkin notes that the act of paying attention to a message establishes one's status as the addressee of that message by "closing ... a circuit of communication" (Larkin 2014: 1007). Thus Alevis must specifically not pay attention in order to maintain their subjective positionality outside of Sunni Islam. Covering up the sound of the call to prayer with the sacred tone of the bağlama is one way of doing this, as I described above. Others may react more harshly, parodying the call in a cracked voice or using its occurrence as an opportunity to criticize the injustice they feel stems from Sunni hegemony. They may describe the muezzin's chanting as "yelling" [*bağırmak*], like Aşık İbreti does in the first line of his deyiş, quoted at the beginning of this section. "Don't climb up the minaret and yell at us!" says İbreti, admonishing the state religious employee [*hoca*] who chants the call to prayer. Instead of seeking ways not to listen to the hoca as Mehmet Baba did, İbreti Baba addresses the hoca directly, resisting his call.

Outspoken rejections of Sunni doctrine are a common feature of many deyiş.[12] However, while Sunnis may be the addressees of these deyiş both syntactically and semantically, they are not technically the intended audience. Rather, such polemic repertoire is more often performed among Alevis themselves as a means of strengthening group identity and articulating their own religious and social values. By positioning

[12] Webb Keane observes a similar pattern in Protestant creeds with respect to rival sects (Keane 2007: 75).

Sunnis as absent addressees, performances of such deyiş in the context of cem or muhabbet gatherings construct what it means to be present at the event as Alevis. This is a presence defined by its inside-ness as oppossed to the Sunnis "out there" who chant the call to prayer, or run the country. As direct responses to the mis-hailings of Sunni Islam, these deyiş allow us to see how the state's strategy of interpellation can fail to produce obedient citizens.

By identifying Sunni sound with the public sphere and Alevi sound with private interiors, I do not mean to suggest that Alevi voices are absent in the former. On the contrary, the 1980s and 1990s witnessed the emergence of Alevilik as a public religion, a movement sometimes referred to as the "Alevi awakening."[13] Kabir Tambar (2010) describes how in the 1970s and 1980s, the sacred Alevi dance *semah* became abstracted from its context in the cem ritual and propagated as folklore in the Turkish public sphere. While many understood this public expression of Alevilik to be a step towards allowing cultural and religious difference, or pluralism, into the national imaginary, in fact the presentation of semah as folklore "re-inscribe[d] the categories of the nation" which many Alevis had sought to unsettle in the first place (Tambar 2010: 652). Public stagings of semah were dictated by official notions which held Alevilik to represent authentic Turkish cultural, ethnic, and racial heritage. Alevis were required to comply with these

[13] See Yavuz 2003, Ellington 2004, Göner 2005, Şahin 2005, Sökefeld 2008.

notions in their public assertions of identity in order to avoid facing violence (Ibid. 662).[14]

The same policy is evident in the way employees of the national broadcasting company [Turkish Radio and Television] have collected, archived, and performed Alevi deyiş as folk music (Tambar 2010: 666). Following official stipulations that folk songs be anonymous, Radio and Television employees often omitted the poet's pen name [*mahlas*] from the last verse. The removal of the mahlas, a crucial textual integer indexing the continuity of Alevi oral tradition, serves to silence an Alevi counter-history by subsuming it within the dominant national history. Like the semah, Alevi deyiş are thus stripped of their context and efficacy within the cem ritual and made to support a narrative of Turkish ethnonationalism.

Meanwhile, Alevi music has also entered the spheres of entertainment and popular culture as the stock repertoire for so-called "türkü bar" drinking establishments in the nightlife districts of major cities. As Birgit Meyer notes in her discussion of Ghanian Pentecostalism, the process by which religion becomes public often ends up casting religion as distraction, entertainment, and popular culture and sparking unease among religious practitioners (Meyer 2006: 300, 308). Alevi unease regarding the proliferation of sacred sounds in public spaces is undergirded by a semiotic ideology radically

[14] This is an example of what Povinelli (2002: 6) calls "multicultural domination" (Tambar 2010: 652).

different from the ideology of Sunnis who intentionally broadcast sacred sound in order to restructure the city as a "space of moral action" (Hirschkind 2009: 22).

The Turkish state tends to consider Alevis wayward Muslims,[15] and attempts to discredit any assertion of Alevilik as a religion in its own right.[16] Alevilik is permissible only as "culture" to be maintained in the interest of Turkish national identity and subordinated to official Sunni religion. Thus, the state attempts to absorb those aspects of Alevilik it considers "religious" within mainstream Sunnism, and those elements it considers "cultural" within national folklore. This is a process of constraining, dismantling, and depoliticizing Alevilik so as to render it ineffective as an instrument of resistance and locus of religious or supranational identity. Tambar argues that public performances of Alevi ritual constitute a "paradox of pluralism" in that they enable differences to emerge into public visibility but at the cost of neutralizing them within the controlled realm of "national spectacle" and official discourse (Tambar 2010: 653). He concludes that pluralism remains primarily a critique mobilized by Alevis against the political system rather than an empirical reality (Ibid. 653).

Attenuation of Alevi ritual penetrates the auralities, spatialities, and aesthetics of expressive culture. To induce a shift in the political and religious efficacy of ritual, one

[15] The question of whether or not Alevis are Muslim is highly debated (see Dressler 2013), and must be the subject of a separate paper. The majority of my informants objected to the label of Muslim and preferred to identify simply as Alevi or Alevi-Bektaşi. Their understanding of Alevilik parallels that of European countries such as Germany and Belgium, where Alevilik is officially recognized as an independent religion.
[16] Kambar notes that the European Commission's annual report on Turkey "regularly includes a discussion of the Turkish state's ongoing failure to adequately recognize Alevi ritual" (Kambar 2010: 656).

must change its embodied forms. Alevis critical of the effects of publicity on the integrity of their religious practices have sought to re-embed Alevi social and religious life within the ritual framework of muhabbet, with its distinct norms of spatial and aural comportment. Dertli Divani is an Alevi-Bektaşi religious leader [*baba*] and poet-composer [*âşık*] who, since 2012, has organized muhabbet groups called *mekteb-i irfan* ("school of wisdom") in eighteen locations in Turkey and Western Europe. These muhabbet groups start out open to the public, but after the first few meetings participants are required to commit to regular attendance, culminating in a final muhabbet presented in front of an audience. Though muhabbet participants perform semah at the final muhabbet, they do so not as folklore but as an integrated part of worship. In fact, Dertli Divani deliberately explains each facet of worship to the audience, including the symbolic meanings encoded in the deyiş they perform and the role of semah within the cem ritual. Such muhabbets present a strong critique of the "aesthetics of publicity" Kambar describes (Ibid. 654), and construct very different spatialities and auralities whose focal points remain within the group, rather than being oriented towards the state. These are spatialities and auralities of interiority and intimacy, as opposed to exteriority and publicity.

III. Dem

We knew dem as the remedy
With dem we wiped ourselves clean
We came to the state you see us in
This dem made us human[17]

—Derviş Kemal (1930-2015)

Dem refers to the divine power that resides in the words, voice, and breath of spiritually mature [*kâmil*] individuals, as well as the moment in which this power manifests (Korkmaz 1993: 92). It is also the name for the alcohol Alevis may drink as part of their collective worship services. With the idea of dem, Alevis draw a link between listening and the acquisition of knowledge on the one hand, and drinking and interiority on the other that is embodied in the phrase "dem is drunk by the ears" [*dem kulaktan içilir*].[18] Just as tea is said to steep [*demlenmek*], Alevis steep—discipline themselves as Alevi subjects—during muhabbet by listening to words of wisdom spoken or sung by spiritually mature individuals.

[17] *Biz demleri derman bildik / Özümüzü demle sildik / Gördüğünüz hale geldik / Bu dem bizi insan etti*
[18] I would like to thank Elif Ceren Altunay for bringing this phrase to my attention, and for sharing with me her thoughtful interpretations of deyiş.

Dem is for Alevis what Bandak calls a counterrefrain (Bandak 2014: S251), providing them with a sort of "ethical therapy" against the injuries of institutionalized religious discrimination (Hirschkind 2009: 37). Dem mitigates against the Sunni Islamic sound so dominant in the Turkish public sphere, from the call to prayer to the sound of the president Erdoğan's mass-mediated voice. Dertli Divani emphasizes the importance of coming to muhabbet and listening to words in order to keep the fabric of communities together and the heart of the individual free of rust.

> You see, in the past everyone would listen to what the elders [*kâmil insanlar*] had to say! Now, unfortunately, the community no longer gathers together for muhabbet, nor does it assent to the decisions made by elders. What does Sıktı Baba say in one of his poems? "One cannot achieve mastery without a master [*mürşit*] / Those who lack mastery are ignorant, it seems / As long as it meets the sledge of the master / There is never a stone that cannot be made to fit the building."[19] He's not talking about a piece of a wall, about a piece of stone. The master is spiritually mature individuals, poet-performer-saints [*arifler, âşıklar, sâdıklar, kâmil insanlar*]. The wall, on the other hand, is those of us who have not yet matured, who are still raw. If you put a piece of stone in the hand of a master, he chisels it from left and right and makes it fit the building. The important thing

[19] *Mürşide ermeyen öğrenmez hüner / Hünersiz kişiler cahilmiş meğer / Ustaz külüğünden geçerse eğer / Yapıya uymadık asla taş olmaz*

is to come to muhabbet and *listen to words* [*Önemli olan muhabbet erkânına girip söz dinlemek*].

Just as the stonemason uses his hammer to shape stones so that they fit within and contribute to the structure of a building, spiritually mature Alevi individuals [*kâmil insanlar*] use their words and voices to shape the bodies and minds of their devotees and constitute Alevi subjects as vital members of their communities. We have seen that the call to prayer in Turkey performs the same subjectivating function, creating Muslim national subjects by virtue of the vast state infrastructure implicated in its sonic reproduction. The Alevis who listen to the words of the kâmil insan and not those of the muezzin bypass the state, submitting and professing allegiance to their spiritual guide [*mürşit*] instead. The mürşit's authority adheres in the voice, and more specifically, the breath—what Alevis call *dem*. Dem is at the heart of an Alevi aural ideology that privileges active listening as a means of accessing esoteric spiritual knowledge [*marifet*]. It is dem that wipes from the heart the residue of those disagreeable sounds and impressions I discussed above, and constitutes Alevi subjects (in Derviş Kemal's words, "this dem made us human").

Dem is a particularly powerful counterrefrain given its underlying ideology of historical continuity. The thread of dem can be traced back to the Imam Ali, who is also known as the "speaking Qur'an." Meanwhile, the same dem is considered to have animated the voice and words of the patron saint of the Alevi-Bektaşis, Hacı Bektaş-ı

Veli, his spiritual descendants such as Abdal Musa and the Çelebi line of mürşit-s, as well as the many poet-performer-saints [*âşıklar*] and religious elders [*dede*, *baba*] who have kept the Alevi oral tradition alive and flourishing. Thus, the function of Alevi worship services is sometimes conceived of as "continuing the dem" [*demi sürmek*]. In one of his hymns featuring the names of all twelve imams [*duaz-ı imam*], collected from Tekirdağ province in Thracian Turkey, Vasfi states:

Lift your head saki,[20] let us see your face	*Kaldır saki başın yüzün görelim*
Let us know our origin, our lineage	*Aslımızı neslimizi bilelim*
Let us continue Abdal Musa Sultan's dem	*Abdal Musa Sultan demi sürelim*
Fill up [my glass] for the love of dolu[21]	*Doldur hemen doldur dolu aşkına*

This stanza not only encourages listeners in the ritual context to "continue Abdal Musa Sultan's[22] dem," in the sense of his ethical legacy, but also makes explicit the metaphorical connection of dem with the alcohol Alevis may consume as part of their worship services. The saki, or wine-pourer, is represented by Ali. Thus the concept of dem emphasizes a lineage that posits Alevis as descendants of Ali through the spiritually

[20] Wine-pourer in Alevi muhabbet ritual. The flow of wine symbolizes the transferene of spiritual knowledge and love [*aşk*]. Therefore, the person who symbolically distributes this knowledge, i.e. dem, represents Ali.
[21] Dem; the alcohol consumed by Alevis during cem or muhabbet rituals, particularly from the hand of the religious elder [*baba, dede, mürşit*].
[22] Abdal Musa was a spiritual successor of Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli via Kadıncık Ana

transformative power of his voice, which was passed on through the line of the Twelve Imams to Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli, from Hacı Bektaş through Kadıncık Ana to Abdal Musa, and from Abdal Musa to Balım Sultan, the founder of the Bektaşi Sufi order who institutionalized the tradition of muhabbet [*Balım Sultan muhabbeti*] as a privileged means of religious worship and education. "Fill up my glass" can thus be interpreted both literally in terms of the ritual practice of drinking alcohol, and figuratively in terms of the transmission of religious knowledge by oral/aural means.

The concept of dem as the embodiment and marker of spiritual lineage is expressed in many Alevi hymns [*deyiş*]. Pir Sultan Abdal (sixteenth century) states, "The voice of the Holy Şah [Ali] / Is in a bird they call the crane [*turna*]."[23] The flight of birds symbolizes the transmigration of souls, one of the fundamental doctrines distinguishing Alevilik from Sunni Islam and one that can be used to substantiate the claim for the historical continuity of dem (Mélikoff 2012: 149). Just as the crane carries the soul [*can*] of Ali, it also carries the dem of Ali in its song. Defining Alevilik in opposition to Sunni and Sufi traditions, Âşık İbreti says, "The language of birds is spoken in our wisdom / Arabic and Persian languages are unnecessary."[24] By "the language of birds," he is referring to the voice—the dem—of Ali. Likewise, one of the prayers [*gülbenk*] read in every cem ritual ends with the supplication, "May the tongue be from us, and the breath

[23] *Hazreti Şah'ın avazı / Turna derler bir kuştadır*
[24] *Kuş dili okunur irfanımızda / Arabi Farisi lisan gerekmez*

from the sovereign Hacı Bektaş Veli" [*dil bizden nefes Hünkâr Hacı Bektaş Veli'den ola*].

The historical continuity of dem is also enacted by means of the textual integer of the pen name [*mahlas*] present in every deyiş. Creatively embedded in the last stanza, the mahlas takes the form of a statement of identity, hence the name of the genre "deyiş" derived from the verb "demek" meaning "to say."[25] For example, Vasfi signs his deyiş, quoted above, by lamenting his poor condition: "I am Vasfi, a wanting beggar in this world" [*Vasfi'yem alemde bir kemter geda*]. When the zakir sings this line as part of her performance in the cem ritual, she identifies with Vasfi as well as with the entire lineage of historical and symbolic figures who have "continued the dem," all the way back to Ali (and Alevis carry their symbolic Ali all the way back to the beginning of the universe). In response to her invocation of the poet-performer-saint [*aşık*], devotees in turn raise their right index finger to their lips and then place their right hand over their heart, thereby acknowledging the poet and signifying that his dem lives on, both on their own tongues and in their own hearts. During the course of a performance of deyiş, intent listeners may also express their embodiment of dem through semi-involuntary exclamations of "Şah," "Ya Şah," "Hû," "Ali'm," "Haydar Haydar," or other short phrases at moments of strong condensed emotion, what Korkmaz calls "keeping dem" [*dem tutmak*] (Korkmaz 1993: 93).

[25] Another name for the genre, "nefes," meaning "breath," points to the historical continuity of dem as the manifestation of the breath of Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli in the voice of devotees.

On the other hand, we might think of dem as something close to what Roland Barthes calls the "grain of the voice" (Barthes 1972). He uses this phrase to refer to the space in which language and voice meet to create song and meaning and to direct analytical attention to the body as the locus of sound production (Ibid. 183). What matters for Barthes, and for Alevis, is the relationship between bodies that arises when we sing and listen to one another. In muhabbet, Alevis strive to attain the unity [*birlik*] of being one body, an experience of the absolute Oneness of the universe [*vahdet-i mevcut*]. In elucidating what it is about the voice that he considers its grain, Barthes says: "The voice is not personal: it expresses nothing of the cantor, of his soul; it is not original … and at the same time it is individual: it has us hear a body which has no civil identity, no 'personality,' but which is nevertheless a separate body" (Ibid. 181). Like Barthes' grain, Alevis' dem is not personal. However, departing from Barthes, dem *is* supposed to be an expression of the soul, because the soul itself is not personal, but extrapersonal and migratory. Furthermore, the expression of dem in muhabbet is not intended to make audible "separate" or "individual" bodies, but rather to instantiate an experience of being one body, together—a loss (or transcendence?) of individuality.

Just as dem in the sense of alcohol requires a glass in order to be poured and consumed, dem in the sense of the "grain of the voice" cannot be properly transmitted without the sacred long-necked lute bağlama as its sonic and affective vessel. Alevis refer to the bağlama as their "stringed Qur'an." Murat, one of my friends who serves as a musician at cem services [*zakir*], explained to me that when he plays saz, the sound does

not exit via the circular opening at the bottom of the instrument but is absorbed instead by his torso and travels up through his throat, coming out together with the words he sings. It is significant that Murat conceptualizes the sound of the saz combining with the voice in the throat, the very locus of Barthes' grain.

Finally, the concept of dem encourages us to think about the voice as an ethical instrument able to shape what Hirschkind calls the "ethical soundscape" (Hirschkind 2009). Hirschkind describes cassette sermon tapes as being "part of the acoustic architecture of a distinct moral vision" in devout Cairo neighborhoods (Ibid. 8). Following Hirschkind and Saba Mahmood, I embrace a Foucauldian and Aristotelian definition of ethics as "those practices, techniques, and discourses through which a subject transforms herself in order to achieve a particular state of being, happiness, or truth" (Mahmood 2005: 28). For Foucault (1997), ethical self-formation can be broken down into four elements: the "substance of ethics," the "mode of subjectivation," "techniques of the self," and telos. Each of these has a corollary within Alevism's own ethical system, broadly defined as the path [*yol*].

The "substance of ethics," or aspects of the self towards which ethical practice is oriented, is the ego [*nefs*] and all of the vices which derive from it including hatred, greed, lust, and arrogance (Mahmood 2005: 30). The "mode of subjectivation," or type of authority through which the subject arrives at truth, is the *pir-talip* relationship, that is, the relationship between a spiritual mentor [*pir*] and his student "seeker" [*talip*] on the path. The master, as Sıtkı Baba says, shapes the rough stone (the seeker) with his sledge

to fit the building (the community). Meanwhile, the phrase "hand to hand to God" [*el ele el Hak'ka*] ties the authority of the pir to that of the ultimate Divine [*Hak*] via an unbroken chain of *talip-pir-mürşit-Hak*, whereby Hak, or God, and by extension all of the lower links on this chain also rely reciprocally upon the talip for their authority.

Foucault's "techniques [or technologies] of the self" correspond to Alevi practices of performing and listening to deyiş—and more specifically, the affective agent animating deyiş, dem (Ibid. 30). More formally, these "techniques of the self" are ritualized in what is called *muhabbet erkânı*, the set of embodied practices surrounding worship in general, and sacred music performance and listening in particular. The word *erkân* is often paired with another, *edep*. I would argue that whereas erkân refers to ethics in Foucault's terms of embodied practices, edep refers to Foucault's understanding of morality as "sets of norms, rules, values, and injunctions" (Ibid. 28). Their common use in tandem as "edep-erkân" in Turkish parlance highlights the active process to which Foucault refers, in which ethics are techniques of bodily practice designed to achieve moral goals. An Alevi youth who, while sitting "at erkân" (i.e., cross-legged in a circle of initiates engaged in muhabbet), gets uncomfortable and extends his legs out in front of him will often be admonished, "edep-erkân!" Likewise, I related a similar episode above in which an authority figure, Mehmet Baba, warned the children at the worship service [*cem*] that it was wrong for them to get up from their spot while the service was in progress, because even sitting in place constitutes a form of worship. These examples

make clear the direct connection between embodied practices (erkân) and moral goals (edep).

Moral goals are not, however, ends unto themselves, but rather the prerequisites for achieving a certain *telos*, or historically situated authoritative model of being (Mahmood 2005: 30). Telos is Foucault's fourth element of ethical self-formation, represented in Alevism by the *insan-ı kâmil*, a person who has reached spiritual maturity by passing through the four doors [*dört kapı*] and forty stations [*kırk makam*] which mark spiritual progress along the Alevi path and becoming one with the Divine [*Hak*]. Historically specific exemplars referenced by contemporary Alevis include Ali, Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli, and the many poet-performer-saints of sacred oral poetry [*ulu ozanlar*] whose work constitutes the discursive foundation of Alevism today.

Let us return to Foucault's second element of ethical self-formation, the "mode of subjectivation." Foucault uses the term subjectivation to designate the subject as the product of power relations that both give it agency and constrain the field within which such agency is operable (Mahmood 2005: 17). Dem is the source of the divine power present in the *pir* or *mürşit* figure. The active listener exercises agency within the bounds of edep-erkân that ensure the success of muhabbet, in order to submit to the power of dem and thereby access spiritual knowledge. Given that submission is necessary for achieving knowledge, it is no surprise that drink and intoxication are used as metaphors for aurality in Alevi deyiş. Even music, as we tend to conceive it in an everyday sense, submits to dem. Alevi bağlama artist Coşkun Karademir told me that "when music meets

with Alevism, it submits" [*Müzik Alevilikle buluştuğunda teslim olur*]. Dem is the potent kernel at the center of music, voice, and being.

The timbre of the bağlama works at the pre-discursive affective[26] level to educate and prepare the listening body to receive and comprehend the sacred texts it itself bears. Typical chordal structures in shifting parallel fourths and fifths, energizing cadential patterns found with slight variations throughout virtually the entire repertoire, and rhythmically propulsive strumming techniques permeate the bodies of receptive Alevis, becoming the affective ground on which poems are interpreted and politics pursued. I say this largely from my own experience of learning and internalizing Alevi religion through taking bağlama lessons, practicing the instrument, and attending and performing at cem services. All that I know or understand about Alevilik has a strong affective element, lodged somewhere in my body as the echoes of a bağlama cadence—*fa sol la*[27]—into which memories and meaning are folded.

Dem constitutes Alevi subjects by means of specific listening practices. Just as dem connotes a certain type of voice, listening in the Alevi context is a particular kind of listening—listening with one's "inner ear" [*can kulağıyla dinlemek*]. The concept of *can kulağıyla dinlemek* rests on an aural ideology privileging interiority. Likewise, Alevis

[26] Hirschkind makes a similar argument about the role of affect in cassette-sermon listening practices of the Islamic Revival in Egypt. He summarizes Brian Massumi's idea of affect as "the myriad emotional movements within the body occurring below or outside of consciousness, the vast sea of emotionally charged perceptual responses that traverse the body without being assimilated as subjective content" (Hirschkind 2009: 82, see Massumi 2002: 27-28).

[27] The ubiquitous *fa-sol-la* cadence found throughout Alevi musical repertoire indexes the Oneness of Hak-Muhammed-Ali.

place high value on esoteric [*batın*] interpretations of deyiş that reveal metaphorical meanings hidden beneath the surface of words. Underlying these practices is the belief that the individual has an essential interior self he or she should come to know. Hüdai Baba (1940-2001) expresses this ideology, and its connection with musical performance, in the following stanza:

Heart, speak the language of emotions!	*Gönül duyguların diliyle konuş*
The saz played with love does not lie	*Aşkınan çalınan saz yalan değil*
If you wish to get acquainted do so with your self	*Tanışayım dersen özünle tanış*
Get word from yourself, the self does not lie	*Sen senden haber al öz yalan değil*

Concepts of interiority and exteriority play an important role in Alevi organization of space, which I have stressed is not separable from sound and listening practices. It is to the spatial organization of sound in Alevi ritual that I now turn.

IV. Didar

Since time immemorial our hearts seek beauty
We are in love we seek the face of God [*Hak*]
Zealot whatever you say my ears do not hear
We are in love we seek the face of God[28]

—Sırrı

Dem is emplaced through its association with a face, or *didar*. To return to Hirschkind's phrase, dem and didar work together to construct the "acoustic architecture of a distinct moral vision" (Hirschkind 2009: 8). The Alevi fixation on didar creates spatial orientations also experienced as listening vectors linking people together. This is most apparent in ritual gatherings where oral poetry is performed and interpreted called *muhabbet* (Ar. "divine love"), also known as "circle prayer" [*halka namazı*]. Instead of facing towards Mecca while praying, Alevis face towards one another because they see God in the human being him or herself, and the beauty of God reflected in the beauty of the human countenance. As a result, Alevi spiritual landscapes differ strikingly from those of Sunni Islam, in which prayer [*namaz*] is oriented towards a single, remote point.

[28] *Ezelden güzelden gönlümüz geçmez / Biz aşığız haktan didar isteriz / Sofu ne söylersin kulak işitmez / Biz aşığız haktan didar isteriz*

During my fieldwork in Turkey in 2015, I participated in a muhabbet group led by Dertli Divani in Istanbul called mekteb-i irfan.[29] As I mentioned above, these groups present a forceful critique of the "aesthetics of publicity" (Kambar 2010: 654) in Turkey that require public expression of Alevilik to fit within the categories of culture or folklore and not religion. The group I joined was an advanced group comprised of participants from several previous mekteb-i irfan sequences that had taken place throughout Istanbul. Though it was not explicitly open to newcomers, I was able to join on the invitation of a friend.

This exclusivity was part of a larger regimen of discipline extending to the modes of comportment [*edep-erkân*] that guide the muhabbet ritual itself and preserve its integrity. Group numbers were kept small so that members could bond with one another (a result of listening) and thus further their knowledge of Alevilik under Dertli Divani's guidance. In this respect, mekteb-i irfan provides a contemporary urban parallel to the intimacy of traditional rural Alevi communities where familiarty at muhabbet gatherings was, and still is, an important precondition of successful worship. For the most part, Alevilik was transmitted within insular communities until the emergence of "public" Alevilik in the 1980s and 90s put greater emphasis on print publications and mass media. As I will argue in this section, the social intimacy produced by specific listening practices and spatial configurations in the context of muhabbet constitutes Alevilik as an

[29] Mekteb-i irfan literally means "school of wisdom." It is a general term that has been used historically by Alevis to refer to muhabbet. The co-leaders of mekteb-i irfan refer to it as an "alternative school."

instrument of resistance and locus of religious and supranational identity, rather than a folkloristic apparatus of the state.

Regular attendees in our muhabbet group ranged in age from early twenties to early fifties but averaged in their late twenties, with men and women participating in equal numbers and capacity. Gathering in a circle, we opened each muhabbet by joining our voices and bağlamas together to perform a set of three deyiş [*üçleme*]. Then we would go around the circle and take turns sharing the research we had prepared on the evening's topic. One week, our topic was the relationship between humans, (the concept of) God, and the universe. Participants brought a diverse array of sources and perspectives to the conversation, many of which were not explicitly "Alevi" or even religious. One of my friends, a graduate student in genetics, spoke about astrophysicists' theories regarding the origin of the universe. As the discussion developed, Dertli Divani stepped in to articulate the central Alevi belief that the sacred is constituted by human co-presence (e.g., in muhabbet), rather than by a transcendent God.

> If there is exoteric [*zahir*] and esoteric [*batın*], there is material [*madde*] and amaterial/meaning [*mânâ*]. Night and day, positive and negative. There is an expression: "this side of the threshold, that side of the threshold." What's on this side of the threshold? We're here, look. Striving to make hearts one, fostering love for each other, respecting, understanding, and listening to one another. Actually you see, the meaning is this! The holiness is here! Otherwise there's no

> holiness in the threshold, the stone, the walls of the cem evi. Actually everything you call mastery, virtue, spirituality is the oneness of hearts here, when you enter through this door. What's outside? When you go outside there are all sorts of people. Some you can only say hello to. Other than that, you can't know if the person passing by you is a murderer or a thief or whatever. Outside you can't feel safe. But here, people trust one another, people cultivate love and respect for one another in their hearts, there's a familiarity.

The focus on interiority across geographical/architectural, literary/semantic, and metaphysical/ontological levels reflects the Alevi ideology that the Divine, imminent in all things, should be sought inwardly. The space inside the cem evi, once you have crossed the threshold [*eşik*] from the outside world, is a space of love, understanding, security, and *listening to one another*. Because people inside listen and love (as the people outside may not), it is a sacred space. The semantic space inside an Alevi deyiş, where one has the freedom and ability to uncover esoteric interpretations, is a space of love and true understanding "of the heart." And the space inside the heart, what the Alevis posit as the essential, inner self, is the ultimate locus of love and understanding.

According to Esat Korkmaz, *didar* is the face of the Beloved in which divine beauty manifests; phrased more directly, it is the face of the Divine (Korkmaz 1993: 98). The voice and face of the Beloved are inextricably connected as mediators of religious

communication through the experience of love and beauty that they offer.[30] Alevis who gather for muhabbet sit facing one another [*cemâl cemâle*] in a circle. Heaven is the face of the Beloved seated opposite oneself in muhabbet.[31] In one of his deyiş, Kul Fakir (1873-1938) says, "The beautiful face of the Friend is heaven to me" [*Dostun gül cemâli cennettir bana*]. For Alevis, there is no heaven outside of these moments; there is no place to direct prayers outside of these circles of friends. As Dertli Divani says, the holiness is here, in the oneness of hearts. Thus, Alevis do not perform the ritual Islamic prayers [*namaz*] which Muslims perform five times a day. For them, muhabbet is prayer; more precisely, it is "circle prayer" [*halka namazı*]. Rather than directing their prayers towards Mecca in Sunni fashion, Alevis direct them towards the people with whom they share muhabbet, and in whose countenance they perceive the Divine. "My Kaaba is the human being" [*Benim kâbem insandır*] is one of the most frequently quoted Alevi creeds, encapsulating the difference between Sunni and Alevi ritual spatialities.

Looking and listening inward keeps Alevis from having their attention caught outside in the cacophony of sonic mis-hailings. Jonathan Z. Smith considers ritual "first and foremost, a mode of paying attention" (Smith 1987: 103). Didar draws the eyes and dem draws the ears away from the hostile outside world, creating ritual space as a realm

[30] In terms of the importance of didar, or the beautiful face, Alevi muhabbet is very similar to Socratic philosophy. For Socrates, philosophizing is an activity in which wisdom is shared through love and reciprocal bonding of souls catalyzed as much by "bodily beauty" as by intellectual stimulation (Peters 1999: 43). Like muhabbet, philosophy in the sense of Socratic dialogue aims to bring about the Oneness of all participants.

[31] For Socrates, "a beautiful face and form recall the vision [of heavenly beauty]" (Peters 1999: 43).

of undivided attention. In this respect, the muhabbet ritual functions as a "means of performing the way things ought to be in conscious tension to the way things are" (Ibid. 109). Dertli Divani makes this opposition explicit by juxtaposing the acoustic space of muhabbet with the sonic unpredictability of the outside environment.

> When you go out on the street there are a myriad of car sounds, other sounds. You hear a lot of sounds. If you lend an ear to all of these you break into multiple pieces. You are unable to listen to your own head because of the noise, and you get tired. In a quieter setting you can come to terms with yourself.

The sounds of the Sunni and AKP-inflected urban environment are not only distracting, but violent. In Dertli Divani's words, they "break" you into "multiple pieces," invading and disrupting your inner self. They prevent you from listening, thus presenting an obstacle to spiritual advancement on the Alevi path. The space of muhabbet, on the other hand, is one where you can listen to others and to yourself, and thus "come to terms with yourself." And to know oneself, for Alevis, is to know the Divine.

The aural faculties Alevis hone within the context of muhabbet do not remain there, however. Rather, Alevis are supposed to take these skills with them into the outside world as defense mechanisms against a hostile soundscape. When they do so, they expand the Alevi "acoustic architecture" far beyond the four walls of the cem evi and convert interior dispositions into exteriorities such as political configurations or musical-

poetic artifacts.[32] Meanwhile, the attention Alevis cultivate towards dem and didar can ideally shut out the sounds of urban Sunni Turkey from their sensoriums. Hence Sırrı says, "Zealot whatever you say my ears do not hear / We are in love we seek the face of God."[33] Dertli Divani claims that those who are able to achieve such mastery of their own senses reach the level of the old prophets.

> Those who stay in seclusion can only get so far. Inside this plurality, these multiple voices, various noises, different things, and in such environments where you can easily cover up your actions on all fronts, to be able to control yourself and discipline your ego according to the moral values we believe in, according to our path, is a much more beautiful thing of course. If you can do this, you reach the level not of the old saints, but of the prophets.

The listening dispositions Alevis hone in the context of muhabbet help them attain a measure of stillness and stability in the midst of a politically and morally chaotic environment. Such stillness allows them to hold onto their Alevi subjectivity and resist assimilation into the Sunni mainstream. Therefore, it is not only the content of the oral poetry performed and interpreted in muhabbet which has political implications in Turkish

[32] On a related note, I have noticed that many Alevis post portraits of themselves or others on social media with deyiş texts as captions. Although these do not come with sound, both the faces [*didar*] in the photographs and the deyiş texts accompanying them index dem and the live co-presence of muhabbet. The mediation of muhabbet in this and other ways should be the subject of a separate study.
[33] *Sofu ne söylersin kulak işitmez / Biz aşığız Haktan didar isteriz*

society as a whole.[34] Rather, the specific listening dispositions brought to bear on this oral poetry in the muhabbet ritual are themselves effective in constituting Alevis as a political opposition in Turkey.

Fig. 2: Istanbul "mekteb-i irfan" muhabbet group at

Şah Kulu Dergahı, Merdivenköy.

[34] I hope to undertake in future work a more detailed analysis of deyiş texts themselves and their use and efficacy outside the context of muhabbet in the formation of Alevi political and religious subjectivity.

V. Conclusion

In this paper, I have demonstrated the mutually constitutive relationship between listening practices and spatial distributions in the context of Alevi muhabbet. To do so, I have relied upon two prominent Alevi concepts: those of the voice [*dem*] and face [*didar*]. I have argued that both aural and spatial norms in Alevi ritual place value on interiority as the locus of an imminent Divine. This emphasis is also elucidated in terms of the architecture of Alevi houses of worship [*cem evi*], the hidden meanings of sacred poetry [*deyiş*], and the innermost true "self." Finally, I have attempted to draw an affective link between listening dispositions honed in the context of muhabbet and Alevi engagement in Turkish politics as an influential minority group. The question of how ethical modes of being learned in muhabbet are carried outside into the world is one I often heard discussed among Alevis. Future research should examine the embodied ways in which Alevis negotiate their ordinary, everyday lives in light of their experiences in muhabbet. This would entail cultivating a more detailed understanding of the dynamics underlying subject formation across all spheres of Alevi life. Ultimately, the question of the relationship between the muhabbet ritual and broader processes of political organization is an urgent one not just for scholars, but for Alevi community leaders themselves.

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